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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2001

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Guillermo E. **Kendall** (Argentina)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

B. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs; limiting meeting duration

Introduction and overview

1. At its 436th meeting, on 27 August 2001, the Committee reviewed the report of the Secretary-General containing the meeting statistics of a core sample of bodies that had met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2000 (A/AC.172/2001/3). The data included the planning accuracy factor, the meeting ratio and utilization factor, and indices for assessing compliance with the deadlines for the submission of pre-session documentation and availability of such documentation for bodies based in those locations.

2. The Committee also considered the note by the Secretariat (A/AC.172/2001/CRP.6) containing statistical information on and analysis of extended meetings and sessions and presenting proposals aimed at limiting meeting duration. In introducing the note, the representative of the Secretariat emphasized that the document was meant to initiate discussion on the subject with the aim of formulating guidelines to limit meeting duration.

Discussion

3. The view was expressed that the Secretariat should continue its efforts to sensitize the chairpersons of intergovernmental bodies to the need to consistently utilize the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources and to strive for 100 per cent utilization, if possible. The Secretariat should utilize the available

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performance data to improve the accuracy with which conference resources were allocated to various organs.

4. The point was made that timely issuance of documentation could improve the utilization factor.

5. Concern was expressed at the increase in the number of extended meetings and sessions. It was noted that this placed an undue burden not only on the Bureau of the Committee and the Secretariat but also on Member States, particularly smaller ones. It was suggested that intergovernmental bodies would be less likely to have recourse to holding meetings beyond regular hours if they could be made aware of the financial consequences of doing so, and that the Secretariat could inform the secretariats of such bodies in advance of what the overtime costs would be.

Conclusions and recommendations

6. The Committee again recommended that chairpersons institute time limits for the presentation of standard documents by the Secretariat.

7. The Committee noted with appreciation that the 2000 utilization factor (a) for the four United Nations offices overall had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent; (b) for Geneva had increased by 3 percentage points; (c) for Vienna had decreased 5 percentage points but for Nairobi had increased 16 points to 100 per cent.

8. The Committee noted, moreover, that 62 per cent of the bodies in the sample had utilized 80 per cent or more of their available conference-servicing resources, an increase of 3 percentage points over 1999.

9. The Committee also took note of the information provided in the note by the Secretariat on limiting meeting duration (A/AC.172/2001/CRP.6).

10. The Committee endorsed the guidelines contained in paragraph 10 of document A/AC.172/2001/CRP.6, as amended, and recommended them to the General Assembly for adoption as follows:

(a) Meetings should be held during regular meeting hours, namely, 1000 to 1300 hours and 1500 to 1800 hours, on working days. Services for additional meetings outside those hours would be provided on an "as available" basis, without prejudice to the principle of equality of all official languages;

(b) Meetings beyond regular hours and especially past midnight should be highly exceptional and limited to organs that have finite closing dates, such as special sessions, conferences and final preparatory meetings for such sessions and conferences, or when postponing the item is not a viable option because of legislative mandates or other extraordinary imperatives; in these cases, requests for meetings beyond regular meeting hours should be formally decided upon by the member States of the body concerned within its allotted meeting time;

(c) Intergovernmental bodies should undertake the review of their meeting patterns and, in coordination with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, adjust their meeting requests for subsequent sessions accordingly;

(d) Requests for the extension of sessions beyond the originally scheduled dates, resumed sessions and other inter-sessional departures would continue to be submitted to the Committee on Conferences and handled in accordance with General Assembly resolution 43/222 B and with past practice as agreed by the Committee (see A/AC.172/2001/CRP.5/Add.1, paras. 2-4).